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ARMED DIPLOMACY: WHY TOO MUCH MILITARY IS DANGEROUS IN LATIN
AMERICA

by

WILLIAM C. BREEDLOVE, Major, USAF, MSC

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Instructor: Dr. Kathleen A. Mahoney-Norris

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

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Abstract

In fiscal year 2008, United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) carried out 122 humanitarian projects in 26 countries. It conducted 65 Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETEs) in 17 countries, treating over 200,000 people and 46,000 animals. In addition, it provided coordinated response to disasters in Costa Rica, Panama, and Haiti. This paper will show that the use of military resources as soft power has many effects on American strategic posture in LATAM. The negative effects include militarizing US foreign policy, shifting funds away from civilian agencies, overestimating the strategic influence, delegitimizing regional actors, stressing US military forces, and degrading the local infrastructure. The positive effects of military use as soft power include providing a constant presence in area of operations, providing training to US military members, improving relations at the local/village level, and establishing contacts for future military operations. Finally, this paper proposes that the most appropriate soft power application of military assets in Latin America for the future is disaster relief. The January 2010 US response to the earthquake in Haiti was used as a case study. In conclusion, over-utilization of the military for purposes other than disaster relief as an instrument of soft power actually serves to weaken the overall strategic posture of the United States in Latin America.

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Introduction

One of the foundational principles of US democracy is that civilian leadership plans and directs the operations of the military. The construct of checks and balances which upholds this system prevents the military from abusing power, creating America's foreign policy, or destroying the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government. In politics, it is widely accepted that the four instruments of power are diplomatic, information, military, and economic. It is important that America utilizes its powers wisely in order to maintain their legitimacy and effectiveness. Most citizens and politicians in America agree that the primary role of the military is fighting and winning wars. However, it is also understood by all that an ever-increasing role for the military involves its use as an agent to resolve humanitarian crises, train foreign militaries, participate in drug interdiction and counterterrorism operations, and respond to natural disasters.

Though used in several combat operations such as Grenada in 1983, Panama in 1989, and Haiti in 1994, the US military has been used with increasing frequency over the past decade as an arm of diplomacy to carry out civil-military relations, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In fiscal year 2008 alone, United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) carried out 122 humanitarian projects in 26 countries.¹ It conducted 65 Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETEs) in 17 countries, treating over 200,000 people and 46,000 animals. In addition, it provided coordinated response to disasters in Costa Rica, Panama, and Haiti.

For the purpose of simplifying this research, the military instrument of power was divided into five elements. These include combat operations (to include conventional and unconventional operations), foreign internal defense (FID), civilian-military operations (CMO), humanitarian assistance (HA), and disaster relief (DR). The first two categories are considered

hard power – the direct influence of enemy or insurgent forces using military might. The latter three are considered elements of soft power. This paper will show that the overuse of military resources as soft power can be detrimental to foreign policy and America's strategic posture in the region. Though most of the military operations and involvement in the region are performed for the sake of improving America's standing and keeping the United States secure, the results show that military involvement does not necessarily equate to strategic gain. The application of soft power via military means does not appear to have the same lasting effect that hard power does. The paper will weigh the positive and negative effects of using the military as soft power from a strategic perspective. Finally, this paper will assess the failures and successes of the Haiti earthquake response in early 2010, Operation Unified Response, and defend that the most appropriate use of military assets in Latin America (LATAM) for future non-combat operations is disaster relief.

Soft and Hard Power

When describing military power, strategists often explain hard power as those actions which involve combat operations and attacks aimed at disabling an enemy force. It involves operations meant to kill, capture, defeat or deter an adversary. It could include such things as direct attack, counter insurgency (COIN), and foreign internal defense (FID). In contrast, soft military operations are those which utilize military assets to influence an adversary or encourage an adversary without the threat or use of lethal force. Soft military power can involve operations such as peacekeeping, nation building, humanitarian assistance operations, disaster response, and civilian-military training programs.

This research project acknowledges that several hard power uses for military have been and continue to be effective in the LAC region. COIN and Foreign Internal Defense are often utilized to achieve diplomatic purposes. Whereas COIN focuses on quelling an insurgency

within a nation, FID is the training of an ally's military forces to enable them to secure and defend their own nation. With the exception of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), civilian US government agencies cannot provide these types of operations. For many decades, foreign military training has been an "important component of foreign assistance."² Officially called the International Military and Education Training (IMET) program, it is managed by the Department of State. An example of this effort is in Colombia where US forces are partnering with the army to combat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). One of President George W. Bush's top diplomats said of Plan Colombia, "A successful Colombia will change the face of South America."³ FID is often used for training special operators and is the primary method by which foreign militaries are trained on irregular warfare tactics. Again, these applications of the US military are considered hard power due to their kinetic nature and the involvement of special operations forces (SOF).

Civilian-Military Operations, or CMO, are activities carried out most often by Civil Affairs (CA) forces to "engage and influence the civil populace by planning, executing, and transitioning Civil Affairs operations in Army, joint, interagency, and multinational operations to support commanders in engaging the civil component of their operational environment in order to enhance CMO or other stated US objectives."⁴ Basically, CMO is how the commander connects the local population to any military efforts occurring in the region. The goal is to win the support of the local population and use that same population to gather intelligence or needed information and coordination to successfully conduct US military operations. Civilian-Military operations encompass a wide range of activities which will not be the focus of this research. Instead, CMO will be considered the enabler and partner to most combat and non-combat operations.

The main focus of this research, therefore, was on humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) operations. As the US military has been stretched by wars in Afghanistan and Iraq over several years, the military assets dedicated to operations in Latin American seem to continue on an uphill trend. The frequency and type of operations continues to grow, and along with regularly scheduled HA missions, disasters have also demanded serious contribution of time and resources in recent years. The question is whether dedication of our US military assets in the region is having a positive strategic effect.

Negative Strategic Effects

To paint the clearest picture of the struggle between use and non-use of military assets as soft power in the Latin American region, one must consider both the positive and negative effects that they generate. Measuring the strategic posture of the United States is an imprecise exercise, but evaluating the facts, after-action reports, and analysis that others have made about the use of US military assets in the region over the past decade is a reliable starting point. The following sections outline the most noteworthy and supported negative and positive effects. The negative effects include militarizing US foreign policy, shifting finances from civilian to military agencies, overestimating strategic influence, delegitimizing regional players, stressing US military forces, and long-term degradation of local infrastructure and systems.

Negative Effect #1 – Militarized US Foreign Policy

Using the military as an instrument of soft power tends to militarize US foreign policy. Placing the military in the lead of too many humanitarian or stability operations has several potential consequences. First, those receiving the aid probably will be fearful of occupation and question the true intent of military personnel being in their homeland. This could create a barrier to effectiveness and could close doors to cooperation, information, and important resources that the military needs to carry out successful operations. Second, the overall mindset of those in the

profession of arms is not to provide humanitarian assistance. The Army has long trained for stability operations after combat operations cease, but the end goal of this process is to hand over control to civilian authorities, either locally or to other US government (USG) agencies. When humanitarian operations depend solely on military members to execute all phases of an operation, those members are often ill-equipped and not able to perform duties as well as their trained civilian counterparts. As Barton and Unger reported from an April 2009 Brookings workshop in civil-military relations, “Despite strong recognition by the military and its congressional advocates that stability operations, economic recovery and development are best conducted by civilian agencies, anemic efforts to build civilian capacity to date have driven the military to continue to expand its capabilities, authorities and resources to carry out such missions.”⁵

There is also a danger that US soldiers will be seen more as a peacekeeping force, equated to blue-helmeted United Nations forces or a “Peace Corps,” than the hard power instrument it is created to be. Finally, LAC countries may begin to believe that US peacetime intervention will always mean armed forces on the ground. Kohn explains that the military, as a result of recent anti-terrorism efforts, has been used “much more frequently to intervene in places and in ways heretofore avoided, for humanitarian as well as political and economic reasons.”⁶ This intervention will result in a reluctance of nations to ask for help and could actually lead to other nations gaining a strategic advantage over America. Steven Kull explains that those entities which have engaged the world via economic means, or soft power, such as China and Europe, are seen as having the most positive influence in the world.⁷ He goes on to describe that highly militarized nations, like Russia and the United States, are having overall negative influence in the world. Hence, the practice of utilizing the military for conducting humanitarian operations, which is supposed to improve foreign relations and ensure security of

US national interests, is actually having the opposite effects in some cases. Having a military presence in almost every humanitarian effort creates doubt among our allies that the civilian government is competent and willing to help and will eventually cause them to turn to others for assistance.

Negative Effect #2 – Financial Shifting from Civilian Agencies to the Military

In addition to militarizing foreign policy, misuse of the military can have significant long-term financial effects on the US government, shifting what should be civilian-led efforts to the military. In the 1990s, Congress decided to put the Department of Defense (DOD) in charge of all government drug war efforts in the Andean region and quadrupled the DOD budget to do so.⁸ After expending \$8.57 billion on antidrug efforts between 1981 and 2001, there was little evidence of success in the DoD-led drug war during that period. “Production potential” in the region and the quantity of drugs entering America actually increased.⁹ After the 2001 terrorist attacks on America, Congress increased the DOD’s authority to commit and distribute funds in several ways. Section 1206 of the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provided funding for DOD to train other militaries in support of counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations.¹⁰ Also from 2005, the DoD Directive 3000.05 mandates that the US military be prepared to assist civilian entities in conducting stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations.¹¹ The Combatant Commander Initiative Fund (CCIF) and Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster and Civic Aid Account (OHDACA) were both in existence prior to 2001 but have been dramatically increased to help support humanitarian operations globally.¹² With all the additional funding for DOD operations, there has been a continued deficiency in the funding and thus, overall capabilities of the Department of State (DOS) and United States Agency on International Development (USAID).

The result of the robust funding stream to the DOD is that it is easier and sometimes quicker to let the military take the lead on operations that should be headed by civilian organizations, such as DOS and USAID. For the short-term, having the military lead is an achievable strategy and one that can be camouflaged under the cover of anti-terrorism operations. However, in the long-term, the legacy of this stove-pipe funding increase to DOD versus the appropriate civilian agencies will wreak havoc on our USG budgeting process. Even in combat zones today such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the civilian agencies charged with government and economic reconstruction are not able to appropriately staff billets because the DOS and USAID do not have the human or financial resources they need. This is why one of the key strategy points for Afghanistan, as presented by President Obama on the 1st of December 2009, is an increase in civilian support in the DOS to ongoing military operations. This is because the DOS has been playing catch-up on staffing shortages for several years. The DOD even passed some military money to the State Department for this very reason. Clearly, this is an unsustainable fiscal and military model. Funds should be redirected from the DOD to the appropriate civilian government agencies to handle stability and humanitarian operations around the globe so that they are not hidden in the bottomless war funding coffers. It should be noted, however, that opponents of this view would argue that if the dollars are redirected, they will never reach the intended recipients. These opponents argue funds have ended up in the DOD budget because that is the most reliable and stable method to get the aid to those in need.

Negative Effect #3 – Overestimated Strategic Influence

Another detriment to the overuse of the military in Latin America is that military operations may not achieve the strategic objectives that politicians believe they do. Most leaders rationalize non-combat operations by explaining they help keep the United States secure by earning the trust of those in LAC and solidify allegiance to democracy across the region. In

reality, many LAC leaders may simply play the pro-democracy or anti-terrorism card of allegiance when they need to because they understand that is the key to receiving help, in all forms and fashions, from the United States. Wiarda explains there is suspicion “that Latin America does not really want democracy, or want it all that much, but has opted for democracy because it knows that this is what the Americans want them to do.”¹³ This adoption of the American democratic model has resulted in the massive outpouring of humanitarian missions which been carried out in the region over the past decade even if the leaders there are not sold on democracy’s effectiveness.

Research shows that Latin American citizens disliked the Bush administration’s decision to go to war in Iraq and felt the United States was moving towards greater hegemony while it neglected financial support to the LAC region in recent years. As The Pew Global Attitudes Project showed that in the years between 2000 and 2008, there was a steady decline in US favorability in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. These results support the hypothesis that the majority of the LAC population felt more isolated from America despite the US military’s increased humanitarian and disaster relief efforts during the same time period.

Since the election of President Obama, the public opinion of the United States in the LAC region has improved. As the same study showed, a large shift in favorability towards the United States occurred between 2008 and 2009 when President Obama was elected and took office.¹⁴ The results were consistent worldwide, and the increases in the three Latin American countries surveyed were similar. US favorability in Argentina increased from 22% to 38%, while that of Brazil increased from 47% to 61% in the year. Mexico was also included, and its US favorability increased from 47% to 69%. In addition to overall favorability, the Pew Global Attitudes Project asked respondents whether they felt President Obama “would do the right thing in world affairs.”¹⁵ The results were overwhelmingly consistent increases between 2008 and

2009. Argentina's confidence spiked from 7% to 61% and Brazil's from 17% to 76% in the single year. Mexico's confidence in the President increased from 16% to 55%. The "Task Force on US Standing in World Affairs" explained that these immediate results can be labeled the "Obama effect," or the "honeymoon period of a new president, his acknowledged rhetorical skills, and what his election signifies about the openness of America."¹⁶

These survey results support two conclusions. First, no matter how many humanitarian missions the military performs in a given region, they cannot affect an entire country's or region's favorability towards the United States. Secondly, the main influence of US favorability and trust is the political influence of the President and top political leaders. Their decisions and foreign policy outweighs any influence the military has at the strategic level. The reality is that treating infants and digging wells has far less strategic-level consequence than the President and other US diplomats making visits, being active in the region political affairs, and most importantly, sending money. This is primarily because elites control the majority of governments, and humanitarian operations are generally focused on the poor. So while military humanitarian missions may temporarily win the hearts and minds of locals, they usually have no significant lasting political influence – the strategic effect of US security that is at the heart of the national diplomatic agenda.

Negative Effect #4 – Regional Players Delegitimized

When the United States puts the military at the tip of its foreign policy spear in LAC, it undermines important players within the region and outside of it. First, it undermines neighboring countries which have vested interests in the survival and well-being of their "neighborhoods" and may want to become involved. Why should the United States supersede locals who want to help? For example, the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) is an organization that promotes private sector engagement in disaster response and has multiple

NGOs and 140 businesses involved and trained.¹⁷ USAID contributes to the organization, so if we let the US military engagement take precedence, we are essentially undercutting our own foreign policy. Likewise, the United States via USAID contributes to a tri-lateral agreement with the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) of the Red Cross to provide a stockpile of emergency supplies to any LAC country in need.¹⁸ If we forego this agreement to airdrop our own military supplies, the USG sends a strong message that the LAC preparedness is not good enough. There is also a risk that regional and global organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and United Nations (UN) are not allowed to contribute to their full capacity. The roles of NGOs, perhaps the most integral local sources of assistance, are also minimized if the DOD takes the lead without including them in operations. These organizations have often been in country for years and know the culture and contacts that make them most effective. In some cases, NGOs report being put in danger by having the US military involved because locals associate them with the military effort.¹⁹

Negative Effect #5 – US Military Forces Stressed

Another result of the United States over-utilizing military resources for diplomatic purposes is demoralizing US troops. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have greatly depleted the enthusiasm and stamina of our military men and women to deploy to faraway locations. Increasing divorce rates, suicide, and depression among members is the indicator that the forces have been stretched too thin and are lacking sufficient manpower to engage in extraneous operations. Even when soldiers deploying to Latin America do not themselves feel the increase of stress, those soldiers left behind at their home stations who have to compensate for their absence are often being overworked.

At a March 1st, 2010, press conference, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Casey, explained that the Army is trying to further increase the current dwell time of 14-15 months to a

standard of 24 months at home between deployments.²⁰ The dwell time has been at only 12 months for most of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He further stated that the Army had a record number of suicides in 2009 and is studying the problem to determine why mitigation efforts are not working. In the current resource-restrained environment of the DOD, humanitarian operations in LAC, which make little progress towards improving the security of the United States, do not seem the best use of our nation's military.

Negative Effect #6 – Consistent Change Leads to Long-term Degradation

Stability and humanitarian operations should be long-term although often the focus is on a training experience for the military members. Because the military needs numbers and statistics to justify the usefulness of the missions, humanitarian operations often treat the symptoms instead of the root problems. This is particularly problematic in medical operations. In Haiti in the 1990s, the director of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) explained extreme frustration with the changeover in medical commanders.²¹ As soon as his organization would get to know one commander, he or she would be replaced with another person. This constant changeover degraded the mission effectiveness in view of PAHO. The long-term view of the sustainability programs or methods can be easily overlooked. And though these experiences may provide a temporary pick-me-up and some relevant training for the military members, they do not tend to have the far-reaching diplomatic consequences of increased local or US security that are sometimes proclaimed.

Proponents for continuing these peacetime military operations would argue that they do provide a stabilizing presence which helps secure US interests. It also seems that USSOUTHCOM made a more concerted effort to include NGOs and locals in the planning of the missions following feedback from the host nations that some missions actually degraded the local infrastructure. However, most after-action reports from Air Force Southern Command

(AFSOUTH) missions show that long-term coordination was still lacking.²² The core of the problem is that stand-alone military humanitarian missions do not produce lasting effects when there is no one left in the field with the same passion, resources, and training to carry on the work to completion.

Positive Strategic Effects

To deny any positive outcomes of non-traditional military operations, or soft power applications, in Latin America would be inaccurate. In order to adequately assess the overall effects on the strategic posture of the United States, we have to examine positive effects of the use of military as soft power in Latin America. The following are the positive outcomes of non-combat military operations in LATAM: constant presence and relationships, beneficial training for US military members, lasting influence at the local level, and establishment of a network for future military operations.

Positive Effect #1 – Sustained Funding Enables Constant Presence and Relationships

The Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) construct for the DOD enables a steady focus on the Latin American Area of Operations by United States Southern Command. By performing a range of military functions in the AOR on an ongoing basis, there is an established funding line for SOUTHCOM to maintain those operations. A couple of benefits arise from the GCC construct. First, a small contingent of forces is always ready to respond quickly to crisis situations, be it humanitarian or combat operations. In some cases, forces may already be in place where an emergency arises, such as the case when SOUTHCOM personnel were on the ground in Haiti during the January 2010 earthquake. By sustaining a constant force at least at the SOUTHCOM headquarters in Miami, there are military personnel already familiar with and trained up on regional issues. By conducting continuous operation, they also have interagency experience and relationships prior to the emergence of crises. The staff has developed

relationships with leaders of the villages or countries where military operations occur during peacetime, and these relationships can be crucial for effective disaster planning.

In addition, the value of interorganizational relationships that are already established by maintaining a constant military presence is immeasurable. The Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies works closely with the SOUTHCOM staff to perform its mission of conducting “educational activities for civilians and the military in the Western Hemisphere to foster trust, mutual understanding, regional cooperation and partner capacity.”²³ There are several DOS liaisons located at the SOUTHCOM headquarters to ensure direct and accurate communication between the DOD and DOS on an ongoing basis and specifically when emergencies arise. The peacetime military focus reflects the strategic priorities of the US government for the LATAM region, and all military operations are supposed to be aligned with and approved by the diplomatic chain of command. SOUTHCOM staff members also interact with multiple NGOs and regional agencies, such as the OAS, on a constant basis to ensure coordinated planning of operations and prevent duplication of effort. Again, having these relationships established in peacetime enables quicker response during time of crisis.

Positive Effect #2 – Military Members Benefit from Training

One of the main reasons for performing humanitarian operations in Latin America is to improve the readiness skills of medical personnel, engineers, and others needing field experience. Particularly for guard and reserve units, these missions were in the past seen as crucial to gaining the war readiness skills that they often could not garner at their home stations. For medical personnel in particular, deploying to remote locations and being able to treat tropical diseases in an austere environment has been viewed as an ideal situation. For those who are supposed to be able to render care in wartime environments, this training has been critical to prepare medics for what used to be a limited number of active duty deployments. Dr Shaun

Price, a surgeon with Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras, says, “We practice in a somewhat austere environment by coming to these places. We become very fastidious in the use of our resources in these facilities. This is what we would probably encounter in a field environment, and a disaster relief kind of situation.”²⁴ Thus, this remains a valid training opportunity for medical residents and some specialists, but the situation has changed somewhat for active duty with the onset of OIF/OEF. The need for deployment preparedness has diminished because medical members now get more hands-on, real-world experience in the deployed setting, and many troops are going back for repeat deployments, as was noted previously.

In addition to readiness training, military members also report a sense of purpose and accomplishment from participating in humanitarian missions in the region. This sense of accomplishment has some positive effects on the military team, including retaining those members who joined the military to see the world but have not yet had the opportunity. In the eyes of most commanders, allowing high value personnel, such as medical staff, to experience these global humanitarian efforts is a small price to pay for retention. As a bonus, most of the missions are relatively short in duration and much closer than the Central Command theatre of operations. The enthusiasm of those participating members can also be infectious and often increases the morale of their home units upon return. Colonel (Dr) Otto Boneta comments, “All of us are in medicine because we want to help people. And being able to go out and help those people that need it – that is particularly rewarding.”²⁵ In summary, both the training and positive psychological impact gained by members participating in Latin American humanitarian operations can be seen as vital to the sustainment of the US military force.

Positive Effect #3 – Lasting Influence at the Village/Individual Level

There is little contention that military teams performing operations Latin America make a significant impact at the local level. Medics take world-class equipment, medicines and skill sets

into often impoverished and underserved areas. Engineers build schools, clinics, wells, and other infrastructure which does improve the living conditions of residents in that area. Lives are saved; individuals' standard of living improves. When coordinated properly, the missions provide open doors for NGOs to continue services after the military operations are complete. The ideal situation is for military personnel to come alongside and fully coordinate efforts with civilian agencies which may already be, or desire to be, operating in the area.

Additionally, these efforts have lasting consequence when they are performed in close cooperation with the local population. Including the locals in developing the mission objectives as well as training them in whatever military specialty is involved teaches them how to perform the tasks instead of simply providing a handout. Just as with current COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, military operations have minimal lasting effect unless the population endorses the actions and works alongside the military personnel to support the objectives. The significant problem, which has already been discussed, is that many military operations seem to occur with little coordination of other agencies or the local population and are executed in a vacuum.

Positive Effect #4 – Contacts Established for Future Military Operations

When a disaster strikes, the best feeling for a planner is to be able to call his friend on site who lives and works and knows an affected population to coordinate support operations. Disaster response occurs more quickly and with fewer mistakes and red tape when established relationships exist with local leaders and non-government organizations. Deploying hard power is also more tolerable for the local population when they know and trust US military forces have operated in their homeland before without seizing power or abusing the population. By performing sustained operations throughout Latin America, SOUTHCOM is posturing for the unseen. They have contacts throughout the region which are sustained by small acts of kindness or reaffirmed by the visit of a medical ship to a country's port. For example, there has been an

effort in Chile to train military medical personnel in the US Combat Casualty Course (C4).²⁶ After completing the course, the Chilean mobile medical teams deployed to Peru and worked side-by-side with US medical staff implementing the skills they learned in the C4 course. The Department of State and US civilian leadership provides the strategic guidance and the funding at the national level, and the military maintains ongoing relationships to the widest extent possible to ensure there is a friend to call when the crisis kicks off in a particular country. After analyzing the positive and negative strategic effects of military use in Latin America as soft power, the author researched the positive and negative strategic outcomes of a recent disaster response in Haiti - the January 2010 earthquake.

Case Study – Haiti Earthquake 2010

“President Preval, on behalf of the Government and people of Haiti, welcomes as essential the efforts in Haiti by the Government and people of the United States to support immediate recovery, stability and long-term rebuilding of Haiti...Secretary Clinton, on behalf of the Government and people of the United States, reaffirms the intention of the United States, through its assistance, to stand by the Haitian people in this time of great tragedy...”²⁷
Joint Communiqué/January 17, 2010

On 12 January of 2010, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck the small island containing Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The SOUTHCOM deputy commander, Lieutenant General Ken Keen, was actually in country when the disaster struck. The SOUTHCOM commander, General Douglas Fraser, immediately established Joint Task Force (JTF) Haiti via the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and immediately began Operation Unified Response. Over the course of the operations and up to March 6th, 2010, the following US military assets had performed missions in Haiti:

- 220 Air Commandos from AF Special Operations Command at Hurlburt arrived January 13th to secure and operate Port-au-Prince airfield; Special Tactics Combat Controllers ran the international airport for the first 12 days from a table beside the runway²⁸

- USAF and Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) flew U.S. OC-135B Open Skies observation aircraft on imagery collection missions (25Jan10)²⁹
- USAF traffic control and airfield management personnel (USTRANSCOM Contingency Response Group) took over air operations at Port-au-Prince from AFSOC
- 30 military helicopters were on site and providing relief at five drop-off points and nine landing zones on January 17th
- 5,800 military personnel on the ground by January 17th (more than 1000 from 82nd Airborne Division) to perform security operations
- USNS Comfort, with 250 hospital beds, 12 operating rooms, and 600 medical personnel on board, arrived January 20th
- US military aircraft had airlifted 130,000 daily rations and 70,000 bottles of water by January 17th
- USS Carl Vinson was providing potable water production by January 17th
- Wilford Hall deployed 30 medical personnel on January 25th ³⁰
- Davis Grant USAF Medical Center deployed 58 medical staff along with an expeditionary medical support unit (EMEDS) tent hospital on January 25th ³¹
- Nearly 11,000 Navy and Marine personnel were stationed on ships off the coast and 4,700 troops on the ground in Haiti by January 27th; more than one million bottles of water and one million meal rations delivered by the military³²
- Air Mobility Command had coordinated 86 patient evacuations to the US for care as well as evacuation of 4,000 American citizens back to the US³³
- At the peak, 30,000 US military troops were deployed to Haiti

As of March 6th, the following list of accomplishment or ongoing military commitments was posted on the USSOUTHCOM website:

- The US military currently has over 10,000 troops, 11 ships, and 30 aircraft in place to support three million affected Haitians
- The USNS Comfort discharged its last Haitian patient on February 27th but remains in the area; over 1000 medical personnel provided care on the ship
- Military medical personnel performed more than 1000 total surgeries throughout the area
- US military had delivered 2.6 million bottles of water, 2.2 million food rations, 17 million pounds of food, and 149,000 pounds of medical supplies
- US forces assisted in port scheduling, vessel monitoring, loading operations, and port security to facilitate an average of 1,300 shipping containers daily
- USAF assets, including UAVs, were utilized to provide aerial reconnaissance support
- USAF air operations specialists and FAA traffic controllers were assisting Haitian air traffic controllers in running the Port-au-Prince airport
- Approximately 2,000 US Army logisticians conduct assessments and provided land and sea-based logistics support via Joint Logistics Command Haiti
- Special Operations Command (SOCOM) personnel purchased and distributed 73,000 radios to establish ongoing communication with the Haitian population.³⁴

As with all military actions, there are positive and negative effects resulting from the US military presence in Haiti. Even though many more points could be made about effects at the lower operational and tactical levels, this paper focuses on the strategic level and how the actions of the military may have contributed to enhancing or degrading the strategic posture of the United States in Latin America. The following are the most significant negative and positive strategic outcomes as of the date of this writing.

Negative Outcomes - Haiti

Most of the negative effects of Operation Unified Response occurred early in the operation. The first negative strategic impact included the massive military force deployment which many called an occupation force. Even despite the public decision-making process and clear intent not to be an invading force, several countries and organizations disagreed with the United States sending so many forces. In particular, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela was very vocal about his distrust of America and its overuse of military forces.³⁵ That is not a new phenomenon for him, but he still garners air time in the international press. Penny Lawrence of the OXFAM organization, a group of NGOs, expressed concern that the US forces were not placed under the UN umbrella.³⁶ Members of Doctors without Borders, a large medical aid NGO, expressed concern about the “militarization of aid” and “distributing food with a gun.”³⁷ Italy’s civil protection chief proclaimed that the intervention was “inefficient and out of touch with reality on the ground.”³⁸ The French Cooperation Minister Alain Joyandet pleaded for the UN to “investigate the dominant US role in relief operations” and argued military forces were not supposed to occupy the country.³⁹ Al-Jazeera English also boasted that the military operations in Haiti compared to a “little Green Zone,” the occupation authority in downtown Baghdad, Iraq.⁴⁰ As of March 1st, the majority of complaints seemed to have been quelled. They did earn considerable press in the international community in the first few days of operations, however, undermining the US efforts.

The second negative outcome from the Haiti operation was that the physical limitation of the Port-au-Prince airfield resulted in negative accusations against the US military in the press questioning the military’s priorities. The lack of capability at the airport focused tremendous public attention to the prioritization for in-bound flights on several occasions. Critics accused the US military of prioritizing their flights over those of civilian organizations. Doctors without

Borders was vocal and reported having patients die because they could not get aid supplies from their airplane that was diverted to the Dominican Republic.⁴¹ They reported having to go to the local market to buy a saw to perform amputations and also had to use alcohol as an anesthetic because medicines were not available. French and Brazilian officials stated that officials were refusing to let their planes land at the Port-au-Prince airport and were diverted to the Dominican Republic as well.⁴² Colonel Elton of the Joint Special Operation Air Component acknowledged the extreme difficulty in prioritizing and landing flights at the disabled airport.⁴³ He ably defended every decision he made, but the reality was that some aid could not be received on-time or at the desired location simply because there was insufficient infrastructure to land, unload, and clear the volume of planes desiring entry. Again, most of these issues were resolved early, but the initial picture that millions of people around the world saw of a small child dying from lack of supplies and basic medical care after having her leg wedged under a rock was a loss for American efforts in Haiti.

The third negative effect was the media blitz concerning the halt of all military aeromedical evacuation operations to the United States. An article in the *Miami Herald* on February 1st stated, “After five days of wrangling and finger-pointing among state and federal officials and the military, the flights were scheduled to resume.”⁴⁴ The press report explains further that aerovac flights were halted because military officials reported Florida was “unwilling to pay for treating victims at their hospitals,” but Florida Governor Charlie Crist denied this allegation. In total, Florida had received 526 Haitian patients to that point, and Governor Crist had requested the activation of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) to assist. The article does not explain whether the NDMS was activated or had anything to do with the halted flights. After witnessing this standoff between states, the federal government, and the military, former FEMA director David Paulison described the Haiti response as “haphazard” and lacking

central coordination. In the end, it is unclear whether any patients died because of this delay in transferring patients to US hospitals. It is clear, however, that this operational pause pitted the military against its own government in the international media. There was never a good explanation from the government clarifying why it occurred or admonishing the military for any negligence. This public spectacle was unnecessary, an embarrassment for the government and the military, and an arrow in the arm of what had been to date a very successful military operation.

Positive Outcomes - Haiti

The first positive effect was that an organized, quick response of massive aid and human resources which reduced the pain and suffering of a devastated country. The US military had personnel on the ground the day after the earthquake struck, helping run the airport. Military capabilities in and around the country increased significantly with each passing day. Without the presence of the military personnel and assets, USAID and other government and non-government agencies' efforts to conduct rescue and humanitarian operations would have been much more limited. The surge of ground forces in the opening weeks ensured the peaceful distribution of food and water and provided assurance to the Haitian people that they had not been forgotten. In the minds of the Haitian people, the United States had come to their rescue – and the US military was the most evident face of that rescue.

A second outcome was that the efficient coordination between Haitian and US government leaders -- mainly non-military -- minimized negative publicity for the US. In the international community, this was the most heavily scrutinized aspect. To begin, President Obama had early talks with President Preval, openly promising him and the people of Haiti that the US would stand beside their country through the tragedy. The open discussion continued as Secretary of State Clinton made repeated visits to the country along with USAID administrator,

Dr. Rajiv Shah, and SOUTHCOM commander, General Fraser. In all public releases, the military was discussed and presented as an assisting force only to USAID and the other organizations at work there. In essence, the US leadership maintained a civilian face on all operations despite having to utilize military capability. The United Nations remained a focal point for ongoing operations in Haiti, and the US stance was that the UN organization was able and would assume the lead role for ongoing stabilization efforts as soon as possible.

Finally, there was a healthy and public discussion about how and when to reduce the military presence in the region. As of mid-March 2010, there had already been a significant reduction in US military personnel to only half of the initial deployment of 20,000 troops. USAID had continued to work very publicly with USSOUTHCOM to plan for the departure of most military assets whenever feasible. Some rebuilding capabilities will be utilized long-term, but most of the services performed by the military will transition to civilian, UN, or NGO leadership. This public forum sent a clear message that the United States does not intend to occupy the country of Haiti and does not prefer to use military assets when dealing with humanitarian crises. That is vital because US allies may not ask for help when they are truly in need if they feel they risk being occupied by military forces. The strategic gain has been that US civilian and military leaders listened intently to the requests of the Haitian government and worked alongside to provide support instead of trying to force change or the American way of dealing with the disaster. This model should bode well for future US involvement with other humanitarian operations in the region.

Summary – Haiti Case Study

In sum, Operation Unified Response in Haiti does not seem to have damaged the US reputation and strategic posture in Latin America. It was timely, adequate, well-planned, and maintained the appropriate lead agencies, USAID and DOS, as the points for all US assistance.

The real question is whether the operation actually furthered the US strategic posture or only succeeded in maintaining the status quo. Either way, the overwhelming response from US citizens, government officials, and military members was that it was the right thing to do to help a neighbor. Since the operation is so new and still ongoing, it is impossible to deduce what the long-term strategic effects will be for the United States' reputation and image in Latin America. The overall assessment is that the US military provided a much-needed and unmatched capability to respond to a large natural disaster. This is the best use for military forces in a non-combat situation. To highlight a few of the mission's outcomes, it has saved countless lives, renewed relationships between the military and government and non-governmental agencies, taught real-world field experience, and demonstrated the rapid and expansive capabilities of the US military.

Strong Defense and Recommended Military Use

In the game of football, sometimes the best way to score points is to have an incredibly strong defense. When the offense cannot manage to score a touchdown, sometimes a strong defense can hold the opponent's offense and even force a turnover. This is arguably the case in Latin America for the United States' strategic posture. Some of the best achievements in US foreign policy and strategic posturing have come in the follow up to disaster. Even though humanitarian assistance and disaster response have some negative consequences as previously discussed, the real strategic gain is maintaining presence and relationships. Some of the actions and results in Operation Unified Response have cast a shadow on the military and US government, but the alternative of no action would have had significantly more degrading consequences. In this instance, like many others in history, the United States has scored by having a strong defense postured for response to the humanitarian crisis in Haiti. By demonstrating a strong commitment in times of national or regional tragedy, the US has abated

some of the need to be ever-present throughout the region. And though not ideal for political strategy, sometimes this is simply how the game has to be played.

In addition, maybe the United States cannot score offensively in Latin America because there is a misunderstanding and a wrong expectation about what democracy should look like there. As Wiarda writes, “The United States lacks an understanding that Latin America and other developing areas often mean something different by ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ than North Americans do.”⁴⁵ The United States has to tread carefully on the field of play when attempting to impose “Western Democracy” on our southern allies. When the team’s offense cannot seem to mount adequate scoring drives, as our foreign policy seems incapable of doing on a consistent basis, sometimes waiting for the fumble on defense is the best option. This seems to have been the case for the last decade in Latin America. A defensive and reactive posture can score points, too, especially when it alleviates mass human suffering and is timely in its delivery.

We do not live in an ideal world where all agencies of the US government are fully funded and adequately staffed. We must therefore understand that a military force as diverse, large, and capable as that of the United States will inevitably be used by its political leadership to advance the diplomatic objectives in Latin America, and any other region, when other government agencies lack the ability to do so. However, leaders need to limit the burdens placed on the military and accurately weigh the projected benefit of each military operation – there is a price to pay. Based on the analysis presented here, the best utilization of the US military in the Latin America region as an instrument of soft power is disaster response.

Disaster response in foreign countries has time and again proven to be an effective use of military force as a non-kinetic means. The main reasons for these successes are the short-term duration of the operations, the preparedness of units to respond and deploy rapidly, the existence of forces and assets already in theater, and the robust training in contingency response present

within DOD. Disaster aid, unlike other humanitarian assistance operations, is meant for a specific location for a limited duration of time. There is no focus on rebuilding infrastructure for an entire nation or on changing current processes of education or elections. The goals are to help the wounded, perform search and rescue, bring necessary supplies of food, water, and shelter, and possibly provide construction assistance in limited areas – meet the immediate needs.

Generally, the US military arrives first and is then relieved by other government or non-government entities, as was the case in Haiti in 2010. Having assets prepositioned around the world helps the DOD respond first and often operate from an unaffected platform, such as a navy vessel at sea. The training that most military members receive has prepared them for quick response and the ability to operate in austere environments. This type of response has the added benefit for the DOD of providing a real-world test of war-time capabilities that military exercises often have difficulty replicating. In addition, an appropriate and quick response of US military assets inevitably provides a very positive media blitz highlighting the competencies of the military and the willingness of America to help its neighbors in need.

Conclusion

Humanitarian assistance in Latin American countries has been tactically and sometimes operationally effective when viewed in isolation from national security strategy. Medical teams have treated the sick; construction teams have erected schools; geological teams have dug wells. But have we left the LAC region more independent than when we first began? Have we improved the strategic posture of the United States? Have we made the United States a safer place to live because of these actions? This research has attempted to demonstrate that the military instrument of soft power is best limited to disaster relief in Central and South America. The issue of sustainability is at the heart of the matter. If the military cannot execute strategic, complete projects that include long-term relationships with local leaders and sustainable

resources, then the military is the not the best organization for the job. When other entities, such as DOS, USAID, UNICEF, and NGOs, have been created for these very purposes, the US government would be wise to let them lead. Certainly hard power applications of the military such as FID, COIN and anti-narcotic operations are making a strategic difference. In addition, there will be another time for combat operations in LAC. Until then, we should not expend unnecessary military might on operations that are unyielding at the strategic level.

¹ USSOUTHCOM Website. Humanitarian Assistance Summary.

² Serafino, Nina. DoD Role in Foreign Assistance, Pg 126.

³ Crandall, Russell. US and Latin America. Pg 97.

⁴ HQ Army. Joint Civil Affairs Operations, Pg ii.

⁵ Barton, Frederick. Civil-Military Relations – Workshop Report, Pg 14.

⁶ Kohn, Richard H. The Danger of Militarization. Pg 96.

⁷ Haugaard, Lisa. Tarnished Image, Pg 7.

⁸ Crandall, Russell. The US and Latin America. Pg 42.

⁹ Crandall, Russell. The US and Latin America. Pg 44.

¹⁰ Serafino, Nina. DoD Role in Foreign Assistance, Pg 130.

¹¹ Serafino, Nina. DoD Role in Foreign Assistance, Pg 121.

¹² Serafino, Nina. DoD Role in Foreign Assistance, Pg 121.

¹³ Wiarda, Howard. Dilemmas of Democracy. Pg 200.

¹⁴ Pew Research Center. The Pew Global Attitudes Project.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center. The Pew Global Attitudes Project.

¹⁶ APSA. US Standing in the World, Pg 6.

¹⁷ USAID. Fact Sheet #1, FY09. Pg 3.

¹⁸ USAID. Fact Sheet #1, FY09. Pg 3.

¹⁹ Serafino, Nina. DoD Role in Foreign Assistance, Pg 136.

²⁰ Military.com. GIs Home More Between Deployments, 1Mar10.

²¹ Jones, Seth. Securing Health. Pg 129.

²² Paige, Chris. “Medical Diplomacy” Research Paper.

²³ Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. CHDS Website.

²⁴ Lopez, Todd. Soldiers Bring Care to People in Need.

²⁵ Lopez, Todd. Soldiers Bring Care to People in Need.

²⁶ Murphy, Sean. Coop Health Engagement. Pg iv.

²⁷ US State Department. Joint Communique, 17Jan10.

²⁸ Elton, Buck. Haiti: Boots on the Ground Perspective.

²⁹ US State Department. Special Haiti Imaging Mission, 25Jan10.

³⁰ Campbell, Sue. Wilford Hall Team Heads to Haiti, 25Jan10.

³¹ Air Force News. Travis AFB Medics Set to Deploy to Haiti, 25Jan10.

³² Lubold, Gordon. Official: Troops in Haiti up to 6 Months, 27Jan10.

³³ AF News Service. Airmen Evacuate Haitians to America, 28Jan10.

³⁴ USSOUTHCOM Website. Earthquake Relief in Haiti.

³⁵ Deutsche Presse-Agentur. Military Evokes Mixed Reaction in Haiti, 26Jan10.

³⁶ Deutsche Presse-Agentur. Military Evokes Mixed Reaction in Haiti, 26Jan10.

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- ³⁷ Deutsche Presse-Agentur. Military Evokes Mixed Reaction in Haiti, 26Jan10.
- ³⁸ Associated Press. Clinton Blasts Critics of Haiti Effort, 27Jan10.
- ³⁹ Associated Press. Clinton Blasts Critics of Haiti Effort, 27Jan10.
- ⁴⁰ Associated Press. Clinton Blasts Critics of Haiti Effort, 27Jan10.
- ⁴¹ Deutsche Presse-Agentur. Military Evokes Mixed Reaction in Haiti, 26Jan10.
- ⁴² Associated Press. Clinton Blasts Critics of Haiti Effort, 27Jan10.
- ⁴³ Elton, Buck. Haiti: Boots on the Ground Perspective.
- ⁴⁴ Miami Herald. Military Evac of Haiti Injured to Resume. 1Feb10.
- ⁴⁵ Wiarda, Howard. Dilemmas of Democracy. Pg 163.

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